

Managing Critical Perceptions

Perception is defined as one's awareness of the environment that surrounds them and how they experience it (Merriam-Webster). To manage the critical perceptions of a website, the manager must design the website in such a way that is attractive to their potential customers and help develop a trustworthy relationship with them. The experience the customer has with a website can influence how they perceive the company and whether they will continue to use the company in the future, which is what makes managing critical perceptions so important.

Presence

In order for a customer to perceive the website in a positive way, the site must have a good presence. In other words, it must be effective in capturing the customer's attention. There are several ways in which a site can do this. Firstly, customers want to feel that they are dealing with real people. Especially since Kids Up Front provides a service as opposed to a good, there is a lack of tangibility that makes it difficult for customers to perceive Kids Up Front. To remedy this, a company can include pictures of their staff and facilities to legitimize their business and enhance the feeling that they are dealing with a company that actually exists. While the executive director of Kids Up Front Calgary Kari Scarlett is present in all of the pictures in the site's, 'What's New' section, she is also the only member of Kids Up Front who represents the company at all the events that they partake in, making the company seem like a 'one man show' that take away from the legitimacy of Kids Up Front. Also, there are no pictures of the other staff in the 'Contact Us' section of the webpage. The description of the staff is limited to the title they hold, making the staff seem impersonal.

Another element in developing a presence is having a brand that appeals to potential customers. Kids Up Front is a well chosen brand name as it relates directly to the services they provide, and it also places emphasis on the fact that the kids come first for the company. The company does lack

some appeal to potential customers, as most people/companies who want to donate their tickets do not see the results of their charity on the site. In contrast, on the Kids Up Front Edmonton site, there is a scrapbook highlighting past events as well as a collection of thank you cards given by the children who received the tickets. While Kids Up Front Calgary does give thank you cards to the company, this is not something that is shown on their site and potential customers will hesitate to donate something when they don't see the positive impact they are making. The brand strength of Kids Up Front Calgary is also fairly weak, as partnerships with other companies are not promoted on either side and are relatively unknown to individual donators.

Trustworthiness

Another way to create positive critical perceptions for the customer is to develop trustworthiness, meaning that the customer feels safe and comfortable when dealing with the site and the company's personnel. By making it easy to contact the staff is only one of the ways that can help develop a trusting relationship between the company and the customer. Kids Up Front Calgary has phone and fax information as well as the locations of their offices to help the customer get in contact with the company.

Another way to create trustworthiness is showing record of the transaction between the company and the customer. This could be a confirmation that the service has taken place through email or phone, or receiving something tangible. In the case of Kids UP Front Calgary, donators are given thank you letters by the children as well as Kids Up Front to confirm that the tickets have been used.

FAQ pages (frequently asked questions) help potential customers find the most important and relevant information they need about the company, making it an important part of creating trust between the company and the customer. Kids Up Front Calgary does not have such a web page and leaves the potential customer to navigate the pages of the website that are often long, cluttered, and

not prioritized according to importance. If the potential customer cannot find the information they need, then they will most likely leave the site frustrated. As you can see, FAQ's are an important way of acquiring customers who can understand the company in a nutshell.

Security is probably one of the biggest factors potential customers consider when they are thinking of doing business with a company. With Kids Up Front, the site should disclose any information regarding the anonymity of donations (if that's what the customer prefers), as well how the site uses and protects the customer's information. Kids Up Front does not discuss the issue of anonymity on their site, while their Edmonton counterpart has a 'Privacy Policy' webpage that discusses both anonymity of donations as well as how customer information is used and protected. The Edmonton site also explains that they use Secure Socket Layers to encrypt data when you donate online. Kids Up Front Calgary would benefit from adding a privacy policy to their site as well as implement a means of donating online that is secure, as they are planning of adding a way to donate tickets and money online in the future.

References

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perceptions>